

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the new covenant of God made flesh, Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord, amen.

The story of the great flood is a favorite among Sunday School teachers and children alike. It's a story of renewal and starting over. For many people it reminds them of the waters of Baptism, but for me, it reminds me of how I play golf. I love the feature of the game of golf where you get to pretend that last shot that went straight into the pond didn't really happen. In golf it's called a Mulligan. The term "Mulligan" may have originated back in the 1930's with John A. "Buddy" Mulligan, who was a locker room attendant at Essex Fells Country Club in New Jersey. One day Mulligan was persuaded by a few players to join their game. Having been busy working all morning, Mulligan was not properly warmed up, and he paid the price with a poor opening tee shot. As legend has it, he turned to his playing partners and told them they got to practice all morning while he was working, so the least they could do is give him a do-over. They agreed, and word spread of the "mulligan" so quickly that other members adopted it for their games. That might be where the golf "mulligan" started but in the waters of the flood God gave creation a huge do over. In that sense the flood is sort of like a Baptism for the whole earth. In the waters of your Baptism, you were also given, not just a single mulligan, but as many do overs as you need to get you back on the path of righteousness and favor with God and with your neighbor.

Most of the time the flood is portrayed in pictures like this... (SLIDE) I mean look how happy Noah seems and how all the pairs of animals are all smiling and getting along... As I studied this story about God's mulligan it occurred to me just how grewsome a tale this is. We're not talking about flooding that happened in my basement a few years ago (SLIDE) or a few farm fields being under water (SLIDE) and unable to be planted. We're talking about the entire face of the earth covered with water taller than the highest mountain tops. (SLIDE) That's a lot of water, folks!

I wondered what made Noah so special that God was willing to reveal the plan to him and to spare his entire family. What made Noah exceptional in the eyes of God? (SLIDE) Was it his winsome personality or his good looks? Was it his work ethic? Did Noah say the right prayers, or did he do enough good works that God took notice of him and made him and his family the exception? It doesn't really say for certain in the book of Genesis what it was about Noah that caught God's eye... The only thing I could find was that Noah was righteous before God. Genesis chapter 6, verse nine says, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God." I'm not sure this description helps us much to determine the qualities Noah possessed that brought him such favor with God. So, I decided to search the rest of the Bible for anything related to Noah. Here's a couple of the things I discovered...

In the book from the prophet Isaiah God says this to God's Chosen People...

“⁷ For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather

you. ⁸ In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with

everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer.

⁹ This is like the days of Noah to me: Just as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and

will not rebuke you. ¹⁰ For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be

removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you. (Isa. 54:7-10) Here God

says this covenant God made with Noah was a covenant of peace. Remember that,

we'll get back to it in a minute... This still doesn't help to figure out what Noah

had that the rest of the humans lacked. Then I came across this verse from Saint

Paul's letter to the Hebrew Churches: “⁷ By faith Noah, warned by God about

events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household;

by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in

accordance with faith. (Heb. 11:7) This lone verse in the book of Hebrews sheds

great light on our friend Noah. He found favor with God because he acted in faith.

Noah, listened to God. He trusted God's Word and he acted in faith. When God

said build an Ark, Noah heard God's still small voice, he trusted what God said,

and he built the Ark exactly as God instructed. When it came time for the rain to

begin, Noah waited for all the animals to board the Ark and obeyed God's commands. That's what set Noah apart from all the other humans. He trusted God enough to do what God said, even when he didn't understand all the details. Imagine how much trust it would have taken for Noah to build a giant ark because it was about to rain. According to the Bible, up until the flood, it had never rained on the earth before. The ground and all the plants were watered by springs that came out of the ground. Plants that were too far away from the springs were watered by the morning dew. There was no rain at all, ever. So, when God said to Noah, "I'm going to make it rain on the face of the earth for 40 days and 40 nights," Noah must have said, "Excuse me Almighty, but what is rain?" Can you imagine the laughter and ridicule Noah must have received by literally everyone around him? Noah has gone off the deep end, they probably thought or even said aloud... The poor fellow has lost his mind... I have no idea what they thought or said to Noah, but I imagine the pressure to stop wasting his time and money building such a clearly useless boat would have been immense. Despite the jeering of his neighbors and friends, Noah was undeterred. He did build the ark and he built it exactly to the specifications God had given. That's faith! That's trusting in things not seen and in things that had literally never happened before, just because God said it. That's the whole point of this epic story. It helps us to understand what real faith is all about. It was the faith of Noah that caught God's eye and

inspired God to offer this great promise, to never destroy all flesh in this way again.

As a sign of this promise God hung his bow in the sky. (SLIDE) We tend to see the rainbow and then remember God's promise about the flood, but the Bible says God put it there **not** to remind us, but as his own reminder to be compassionate and kind to His creation. The Hebrew word used here is the same word used for the bow used by archers. (SLIDE) During the time when this story was being written and edited into this final form, the highest form of technology used in warfare were the battalions of archers and the bow and arrow were the tomahawk missiles of the day. Archers were the most effective weapons of war and the most feared. So, by hanging His bow in the heavens, God is promising never to be at war with all creation again. That's why the prophet Isaiah said this was a covenant of peace. It's God's peace treaty. If the earth is going to be destroyed again, it won't be by the hand of God... He's hung up his weapons. Instead, God chooses a more compassionate and loving approach. His weapons of choice are kindness and Grace... (SLIDE)

When God acts with compassion and kindness toward us, we call that Grace. It's grace because none of us deserve God's unmerited favor. Remember your confirmation definition of Grace? God's Riches At Christ's Expense... Grace is the unearned and unwarranted love of God, not because of who we are or anything

we've done, but simply because of who God is... Even Noah disgraced himself by allowing himself to be caught drunk and naked by his son, Ham. So, even Noah, who had God's eye and was righteous and blameless, even this great man who we still talk about and teach about to our children in Sunday School, even this faithfilled man who walked with God, sinned and fell short of God's glory. None of us are perfect, not even Noah. Yet because of his faith and his trust in God, God saved Noah and his family and at the same time gave the human race our first mulligan.

Since then, God has been in the mulligan granting business. Instead of looking upon humans and seeing the evil we do on a daily basis, God looks at us and sees opportunities for love, forgiveness, and Grace. Our sin still grieves God, but instead of wrath, God provides for us, God loves us, and God forgives us. God makes us totally new creatures, not in the flood waters of Noah, but in the Baptismal Waters of Christ's Church. (SLIDE) In our Baptism God forgives us and blots out our sin and we arise out of the water of Baptism a new creation, one that lives and walks with God by faith.

May we have the faith of Noah to hear God's still small voice and obey. May we see God's bow hanging in the sky and trust God loves us enough to never go to war again with all humanity, but rather remind himself of God's promise to love and to redeem us now and every day. Amen.